1: Orans E-5 (1957-1958) 1965
AW42 Santal AW42

development and characteristics of this emergent great tradition. In seeking such understanding, attention has been focused on the shifting historical pressures for and against acculturation and assimilation, and on the impact of a spreading market economy, industrialization and political democracy. Though this is not at all a monograph purporting to tell all about a particular people, the events described are largely the experience of a single tribe, the Santal, who live primarily on the Chotanagpur Plateau of Bihar, West Bengal, and northern Orissa in India. This is, then, in part "their story," understood often in terms peculiar to their experience. Nevertheless, the experiences of the Santal suggest certain widely prevalent processes which I call the "rank concession syndrome." These processes are speculatively held to pertain to all part-societies which have conceded rank to a dominant surrounding society. In particular the pressures for and against assimilation are regarded as crucial determinants and these in turn are seen to depend significantly upon shifting avenues of mobility. Movements of self-conscious cultural creativity are viewed in relation to the conflicting stimuli generated by pressures for and against assimilation. There are adequate if not compelling theoretical and practical reasons for making the Santal the object of such a study. The characteristically primitive world-view and social organization of traditional Santal culture provides a sufficiently contrasting background against which to view the impact of such modern conditions as the market, industrial employment and political democracy. Similarly the heavy commitment to pursuit of pleasure and the characteristically unreflective character of traditional Santal culture contrast sharply with the dominant surrounding Brahmanical tradition. Their patterns of social interaction and group structure rest heavily upon a markedly patrilineal kinship system

1: Orans E-5 (1957-1958) 1965
AW42 Santal AW42

the Santal" as Culshaw properly describes him.[4] Other "nationally" shared deities of the Grove are *Jaherera, Liṭa, Gōsāe Era* (Hindi: *Gosain* = pious one), *Mōṛeko* (the Five) and *Tureko* (the Six).[5]

Marañ Buru is regarded as a kind of chief deity, though that honor is sometimes ascribed to Cando (literally "moon," as in Hindi, *chand*) or Siñ-Cando (sun-moon) to Ṭhakur, etc. The great variety of names associated almost haphazardly with the notion of "chief" or "biggest" deity is consistent with the acephalous Santal social structure. Nevertheless the Santal do manifest tribal solidarity, and though every house, local lineage, etc., has its own deities, Marañ Buru always receives his portion of sacrifices, gift offerings and prayer. This constitutes another link between the Santal and other Mundari tribes of the region, who share most of these deities.

Sinha has characterized Indian tribals as conceiving of the good life as one with "ample scope for indulgence in pleasure, while maintaining social obligations to corporate group or groups" (Sinha 1959:309). Culshaw similarly begins his chapter on "Dancing, Music, and Poetry" with the comment that the word "*ṛaṣka* meaning 'pleasure' is often on the lips of the Santal, and it is dear to their hearts."[6] One could hardly begin such a chapter differently, for the traditional sense of the word "pleasure" (*ṛaṣka*) makes it virtually synonymous with dancing

[4] Culshaw, *ibid.*

[5] *Jaherera* is sometimes called *Jaher Buḍhi* ("Old Lady of the Sacred Grove") and is said to be the consort of Marañ Buru. *Liṭa* is prominent in hunting rites; the rainbow is referred to as the "bow of *Liṭa*." As for the Five and Six, not even the most erudite of the Santal seem to have any knowledge of them other than when they are to receive offerings and prayer.

[6] Culshaw, *ibid.*, 39.

1: Orans E-5 (1957-1958) 1965
AW42 Santal AW42

• 181 and singing, playing and listening to music, eating festively, drinking rice beer, and implicitly sexual activity; in practice, [521] these are the activities characteristic of a Santal festival. When a traditional and typically uneducated Santal meets another from a distant region, one of the first questions asked will be, "How is pleasure in your region?" The reply will focus on the [152] activities mentioned above. Indeed, the only occasion in which I observed a fully sober Santal male adult burst into tears was during such a festive event. When I asked the old man why he was weeping at such a time, he replied, "The sounds of the drum remind me of the pleasure of my youth and of my [273] deceased wife who shared in my pleasure." It will be recalled [192] that it was rice beer which enabled the propagation of the Santal to proceed in the beginning of things, and if there is one word which is more frequently uttered than any other, more frequent even than the sound of festive drums, it is the cry of "*haṇḍi, haṇḍi haṇḍi*" (rice beer; from *handia*, Hindi = [539] an earthenware container). As the Santal sing:

> Oh "flower friend"*
> I am thirsty and I am hungry;
> But hearing the sound of the drums under the canopy†
> My thirst and hunger are banished.

181 The Santal pleasure complex is of primary importance in 527 considering recent economic and political events, but here the concern is with "pleasure" as a shared understanding serving the solidarity of the Santal. As the Santal think of it, "pleasure"

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[192] * A "flower friend" or *phul* (as in Hindi *phul* = flower) is a formally cele-[572] brated ritual friendship.

[192] † The "canopy" or *chamda* is utilized in wedding ceremonies to cover the [585] area in which the ceremony takes place.

1: Orans E-5 (1957-1958) 1965
AW42 Santal AW42

181 is pre-eminently a social phenomenon: it obtains essentially
527 during festivals, which are community events; it derives from
[535] a festive atmosphere, which only the assembled community can create; and it reaches its community-centered peak as throngs of men and women form a large dancing circle, men and women alternating so that each one has a member of the opposite sex on each side, hands joined together. While I am sensible of anthropological naïveté, the remarks and demeanor of the Santal on such occasions leave little doubt that such performances are a potent source as well as a reflection of community solidarity. During and just after such dancing there is generally great camaraderie, and everyone exchanges cigarettes and rice beer while moving about from one house to another.

527 Although it is above all village solidarity which such festivals
628 enhance and reflect, they also draw together the members of a particular village and Santal from as far as thirty miles away. The Santal are aware of the attraction of the drums and in many regions festivals are celebrated at slightly different times by nearby villages so that one can participate in several, and
181 so that reciprocity becomes possible. "Pleasure," as the Santal
619 understand the term, is a shared understanding which creates
648 immediate bonds with co-tribals wherever they may be from, and, like many other more official boundary-marking symbols of solidarity, also binds the Santal to the neighboring Mundari tribes; it is not uncommon to find some members of several of these tribes participating in any particular Santal festival. To
[273] be sure it is also possible to see drunken men quarreling at a
[578] Santal festival, and other signs of discord, but this will be discussed later.

619 The Santal origin myth validates the kinship ties between all Santal and thereby provides a basis for such unity as the Santal

1: Orans E-5 (1957-1958) 1965
AW42 Santal AW42

Chapter 2 External Solidarity

000 The "likenesses" of a particular people not only contribute to internal bonds of solidarity, but by virtue of their distinctiveness may also serve as a barrier against assimilation in surrounding societies. The more distinctive these likenesses, the more inconsistent with the culture of the surrounding societies, the better they serve to preserve solidarity.

• 181 The chief traits which have divided the Santal from their predominantly Hindu neighbors are the "pleasure" complex mentioned earlier and the practices of cow sacrifice and beef eating. Among the practices associated with the pleasure complex 535 the most conspicuous are public mixed dancing such as occurs at festivals and the drinking of rice beer, as well as its ritual use. The Hindus regard Santal mixed dancing as an orgy, 648 [535] although it is in fact no more promiscuous than Western mixed dancing and is certainly less sensuous than much of Hindu classical dancing. As for cow sacrifice and beef eating, the stringency of the Hindu attitude is well known; on many occasions 171 armed force has been used to halt both. It is again significant that these distinctive traits are shared by the other

1: Orans E-5 (1957-1958) 1965
AW42 Santal AW42

177 262 871 haviorally. A Santal student with only a few years of schooling may have learned the rank value of a given practice such as beef eating, but may not have internalized the appropriate feeling of repugnance. He will therefore eat beef and drink rice beer on the sly, but prefer to be known as an abstainer.

177 554 871 181 The "pleasure" traits and the "pleasure" orientation, as well as cow-sacrifice and beef eating, are not only part of the cultural basis of external solidarity; they are also key attributes of low rank value in the prevailing caste system. In the schools one learns, with varying force, that the dominant and powerful Hindus regard both the orientation and the traits associated with it as abhorrent and as symbols of low status. With a high school education or more, internalization is usually adequate to provide Santal with their own abhorrence of this orientation. Such Santal, particularly if they do not return to their native villages but take up residence in Jamshedpur, find themselves unable to participate in the traditional "pleasure" activities, even when they return to or visit a village or *bustee*.

What replaces the "pleasure" orientation is an increased commitment to rank improvement, adequate knowledge of the rank attributes of the Hindu world, and, in the case of the relatively well-educated Santal, the necessary internalization to display these attributes consistently and adequately. As the Santal commonly say, "The 'ignorant-illiterate' do not know who is big and who is small!"

Increased education resulting from the existence and practice of industrial employment has thus widened the cultural gap between the Santal and thereby weakened Santal solidarity. Many uneducated Santal are barely able to interact with the educated and highly acculturated. As one Santal remarked when faced with the prospect of such interaction, "I cannot go to his

1: Orans E-5 (1957-1958) 1965
AW42 Santal AW42

177 house, he is like a *Diku*; before him I feel like a black Santal."
554 I have heard other Santal remark that they could not sing or
871 talk freely before a certain educated Santal who was a village
• 181 leader because his bearing made them ill at ease. It seems particularly difficult to carry on the normal "pleasure" activities such as dancing, singing, drinking, and even convivial conversation, before such august Santal. The same gap seen from the vantage point of the educated is expressed in the following remarks of an educated woman:

> I am happy now to be living in the city because both my child and I were sick from "envy" [i.e., being "envied" by others] when we lived in the *bustee*; all are healthy here. I never danced or sang in the village though I liked to watch; my mother and sister danced but I didn't. When very young I did, but after I started going to school, I didn't. Some don't send their children to school because others will have "envy" and say that highly educated girls will be outcasted for marrying into other castes; that is not true. Why shouldn't we study as high as money allows? *Diku* girls do.

[192] Less eloquent educated Santal simply explain matters by saying that they have become "embarrassed" (*lajao*) to dance, sing, etc.

177 If differential Hinduization is the major component of the
871 gap created by education, it is not the only component. An additional divisive effect of education is that it gives the student a secular orientation which is highly differentiating but of limited effect since only those with college educations acquire it
177 thoroughly. There are various manifestations of this orien-
754 tation, but a particularly interesting example which I have
871 discussed elsewhere[1] concerns differences in beliefs about witch-
184

[1] Orans 1959.

The Santal

177 Millet we never get.
178 Day by day we starve and become desiccated, *haeri.*
539 Dirty grass huts, poverty, and sickness cause us to moan, *haeri.*
668 Continuous sickness follows us all our life.
Who will cure this?

Marań Buru is like an *ojha* [medicine man in Santali and Hindi]
He will end this sickness.
Let us drive out this evil by applying our intelligence.
Let us drive it out with our sacred prayers.
This religion will wipe away the sin.
With the help of religion let us bid this evil go.
Then we will obtain heaven's reward, god-given love and joy.
Through religion the poverty and sickness of hell will vanish.

This last song in particular is interspersed with Oriya and [771] Sanskritic words. It also introduces heaven and hell, neither of which has a place in the traditional religion; but Marań Buru, the tribal deity of the Santal, retains his place, and leaders of the Jharkhand political movement are prominent.

The shame which the elite leaders feel for the traditional "pleasure" orientation is expressed in the following song:

After drinking rice beer,
After getting drunk,
A man walks with his *ăhoti* falling to the ground.
Seeing all these bad things the aboriginal brother becomes sorrowful.

177 There are several reasons why the traditional "pleasure"
178 orientation is opposed. As already suggested, it is an attribute
• 181 of low status in the prevailing system of caste ranking, and
668 the elite have internalized a distaste for it, especially for its

1: Orans E-5 (1957-1958) 1965
AW42 Santal AW42

177 more manifest appearances. For this reason they particularly
178 oppose mixed dancing. As the songs above make plain, "pleas-
• 181 ure" is felt to be a detriment to study, hard work, mobility,
668 and the "progress" of tribals. Almost all Santal industrial workers condemn "too much pleasure," and even in remote villages it is generally felt that "pleasure" needs to be curtailed. However, it is only the educated, and not by any means all of them, who have deeply internalized this attitude and who can make it work for them. At a "fair" (*paṭa* in Hindi and Santali) more than half the Santal present said that fairs are bad; "at these fairs we only run around like dogs and spend our money"; but they were participating nevertheless and having considerable "pleasure."

[871] It is a fact that many Santal fail in school because they are lured away from their studies by the traditional "pleasure"
[461] activities. Similarly, there are some absences without leave from TISCO and some instances of coming to work drunk which are the result of too much "pleasure," particularly during festivals. Through songs, plays, speeches, and even prayers, the new cultural movement has succeeded in making most Santal feel that they ought not to over-indulge; but it would be too much to say that it has succeeded in changing the dominant motif of Santal culture. However, the commitment to personal and tribal mobility and the inhibition of "pleasure" are continually reinforced by the obvious increase in the possibilities of advancement.

[861] It is not yet common in the villages but everywhere apparent in the *bustees* and in Jamshedpur that fathers scold their children for wasting time and remind them that if they do not study they shall end up "throwing about dung" or performing other menial jobs requiring hard and undignified labor. Most

2: Skrefsrud M-5 (1870-1871) 1942 AW42 Santal AW42

VII. CONCERNING PLEASURE AND JOY

181 517 To forget care and anxiety we have pleasure and joy: Dancing, singing, drumming the dancing-drum and the kettle-drum, blowing the flute and the horn, playing the fiddle, folk-tales, stories and conundrums, hunting in the forest, catching fish, and beer drinking. Also metaphorical speech will bring pleasure; but this is to tutor people, we use it mostly in connexion with serious work.

a. Singing and dancing.

533 535 We have very many kinds of dances, and in connexion with the separate dances we also have songs. In connexion with dancing and singing we drum the dancing-drum and the kettle-drum, and we blow the flute. The names of our dances and songs are the following: lagṛē, dọn, guluṣri, ḍahar, baha, riñja, bhinṣạr, jhikṣ, humṭi, guñjạr, ṣghrae, lọbọe, and duñgẹr. Dances without songs: the sword dance, the Dom dance, and lọuriṣ. And songs without dancing are: forest songs, marriage recitation songs, folk-tale songs, rice-planting songs, and dirges. We blow the horn, for pleasure, at the

534 Flower festival and during the hunt without any dancing. We play the fiddle with all songs. We make the flutes of hollow bamboo, called bar laṅga bamboo. The horn we make of the buffalo-cow's horn and of the horn of the buffalo, and also of the horn of the Black Buck. The fiddle they make of wood or of a pumpkin shell, and on this they put a string of catgut, only one, and having strung horse-tail hair on a bow they fiddle; on the hair of the fiddle bow they apply salga[1] raisin; then only it sounds. The kettle-drum they make of an iron frame which they cover with buffalo skin. The dancing-drum they make with a cylindrical earthenware frame and cover it with skin of goats, etc.

535 Lagṛē, guluṣri, and humṭi they dance at any time, the flower dance only at the Flower festival; the ṣghrae, matwar, and guñjạr dances they dance at the Sohrae festival; riñja and bhinṣạr they dance at the Karam festival; dọn they dance at marriages and at the Chaṭiọr festivals; ḍahar they dance during the hot season, only girls; jhikṣ they dance at the Chaṭiọr, the Dom dance at marriages; and paṣk dọn (the sword dance) and lọuriṣ they dance at Sohrae and Sakrat, men only; lọbọe they dance at the Durga festival, and duñgẹr they dance when they spend the night at the hunt.

[1] Borreilia theriferu, Celebrecka.

3i Mukherjea O. Y-4,5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
AW42 Santal AW42

The Economic Background of Santal life

"Where shall I get the rice to brew beer?" pleaded a Santal accused in an excise case answering a charge of distilling spirits. It was pointed out that no excise rules prevented him from fermenting "hàṇḍia," the home-made beer. "Where shall I get the rice?" the puzzling defence was hurled at the magistrate, sitting at the courts of Dumka, S. P.

Some time after, news trickled from Jamtara areas that some infuriated Santals ran after those who went to help them during a conflagration in their villages with bows and arrows, seeking to shoot them down. "We have nothing to eat, let fire take our houses too," was what they exclaimed, not that they could not understand the humanitarian services of the village fire-brigade.

Those were years of some scarcity no doubt, but the pictures afford us a glimpse of Santal economic life. They seem to have no power of resistance against a rainy day and think more of drinks to drown their sorrow, even if they have to infringe excise laws. In the Santal economic background poverty seems to loom large. No wonder that one of their folk-songs during the December Harvest Home has these telling lines:—

Dè ho duṛup'pè,[1]
Dè ho tèṅgòṅpè,

1 The full song has been incorporated in the chapter on Folk-poetry.

3t Mukherjea O. Y-4, 6 (ca. 1933-1930) 1962
AW42 Santal AW42

735 293 154 sorrows. It is a pathetic sight to see young Santals keep sober till they marry, and then grow old suddenly as cares and anxieties of life come to them, when they plunge headlong in a sodden life.

• 181 The rigours of their life on the earth are somewhat overcome by the objects of material culture we have noted in the foregoing pages. But one can easily see that they are crude devices of a primitive world, not serving their purpose well in the [171] twentieth century. But, one must however notice that the level of culture presented by the Santal is on a par with that of the rest of the hill tribes of what may be called the Central Belt of India, which is a homogeneous culture-area in all important respects.

Conclusion

174 181 224 241 433 As we conclude the review of Santal economic life, we find that the actual stage reached by the tribe in its material culture is still primitive. Their traditions make it clear that there was a time in the life of the Santals when they lived a semi-hunting nomadic life, perpetually moving in quest of food. But the picture we have got in the foregoing pages reveals a people who have finally accepted the life of settled agriculturists.

177 As, however, we look closely to the objects of Santal material culture, we notice similarities with

3t Mukherjea O. Y-4, 5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1902
AW42 Santal AW42

684 All this time a tribal feast is in preparation at the cost of the offender at his house. The tribe assembles there. The outcaste washes the feet of the village elders, and thereafter serves the food personally to the tribe assembled. After the feast, the "Mòṇṛèn hòṛ" (the village elders) address the couple saying, "Henceforth you are parted. But should you unite again, you will be fined Rs. 25 each and driven out of the country." They then dig a hole and bury cowdung there or they may simply deposit some cow-dung on the place of the feast. In conclusion, the village-priest offers three fowls to the gods *Jaher era*, "Mòntènko" and *Maraṅ Buru* so that they may purify the village from the sin committed by the guilty couple, now formally divorced.

[782] [793] [783]

Conclusion

181 619 783 784 The tribal psychology behind these proceedings is not very difficult to be understood. The Santals, like other *Muṇḍà* tribes, consider their tribal solidarity and strength to be their first concern. In the preservation of this tribal entity from conscious or unconscious pollution, they are fired by a primitive fanaticism and they take all measures whereby, they think, they can purify the tribe as a whole, as intrigues beyond the permitted degrees and unions with foreigners serve as the medium of supernatural

3i Mukherjea O. Y-4,5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
AW42 Santal AW42

dangers visiting the tribe. In the background of their minds, they are not imbued by any moral feelings or any sense of tribal aristocracy. Some think that in case of such transgression, the gods in their ire will send drought and famine and pestilence in the place thus visited by sin as it is an insult to them. But when one analyses the behaviour of the Santal masses, when they receive news of prohibited sexual congress and the collective indignation they give vent to as a reaction, one is led to believe that the Santal's almost "instinctive fear of such defilement has behind it also the sub-conscious and, to all appearances, instinctive fear of a mysterious dangerous power of the nature of *mana* infecting the erring woman and her family and calculated to prove contaminating and destructive as death."[1]

Santal Customary Law

We have seen in the foregoing pages that the village-council is the repository of Santal tribal law concerning succession and inheritance. It is therefore necessary for us to give the reader some idea of the law on the subject.

Generally speaking, all the sons of a Santal have equal shares of inheritance in the properties left by their deceased father. The daughter has no right

1. The Kharias. Page 177. Rai Bahadur S. C. Roy.

[113]

3t Mukherjea O. Y-4, 5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
AW42 Santal AW42
SANTAL PARGANAS

Matko Sabha.' But even this body which represents more advanced opinion was not in favour of permitting a Santal to transfer by will anything except his self-acquired property; and the President admitted that this change would have little practical effect, since the laws against alienation practically limit the self-acquired property to such land as the raiyat has himself reclaimed."

Considering all these, the committee did not think a change ought to be enforced by legislation and hoped that the customary law would develop 'naturally and gradually.' Finally, they recommended that civil cases involving questions of Santal law of inheritance should, where possible, be referred to arbitration by Santal arbitrators to facilitate the growth of a convention.

Conclusion

We have already seen that the Santals have a well-knit social organization which moulds their thoughts, feelings and actions. So the sentiments produced in the mind of the tribe have a special stamp of their own. The actions inspired by these ideas have a similarity under social discipline and these, in their turn, crystallize into usages, and next,

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1. Hõṛ Malto Maraṅ sabha (?)

Bt Mukherjea O. Y-4,5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
AW42 Santal AW42

into customary laws. The Santal has, in his own way, learned to value the corporate discipline necessary under social life. He has built up his own body of traditions and customs and has appointed proper custodians to look over them, to administer them for the well-being of the tribe on the earth. Nobody expects from the Santal the cultural level we associate with the civilized races in India, but enquirers into their manners and customs must be struck with the correlation of the cultural evolution of the tribe with its material and environmental back-ground, noticed in the previous chapters.

Scholars of Pre-Dravidian life have noticed the communistic aspect of their society. In many instances, this holds true of Santal life. The leadership of the tribe, whether social or socio-religious as exercised by the Headman or the Priest, is exercised with due restraint because of the check imposed by the consultative body known as "*Monren hor*." Thus Santal tribal judgments have that provision for justice and fair-play which all civilised societies crave. That such democratic ideas permeate the whole tribe will be apparent from the practice of offering gifts to the member in whose house there is festival going on. To a people who are remarkably poor like the Santals, this practice lightens the burden of the house-holder, bound by custom to provide community feasts and drinks, apart from

3t Mukherjea O. Y-4, 5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
AW42 Santal AW42

105 182 431 being an evidence of fraternal virtues of co-operation.

105 181 421 836 Although ideas of individualism have saturated the Santal social fabric and they now own private property, and have personal ownership over many things, communistic ideas in origin can be easily traced in the custom which allows all bachelors of the tribe to have free access and intercourse with the unmarried girls of the tribe barring of course customary prohibited degrees and relations.

105 593 Evidence of discipline in family life can be easily noticed. Their heads of families are held in great esteem and their commands are carried out [611] respectfully. Although the family is patrilineal and patripotestal, the mother has her natural voice in the family-life and women, notwithstanding all their legal disabilities, have their moral rights assured.

105 181 582 Nowhere is the democratic authority of the appointed guardians of the tribe in better evidence than in the cases of marriage regulations. It is in the administration of these that we can see the will of the Santals finds fullest play. We have seen in the foregoing pages how clan-incest is detested and how the erring ones undergo penance and restored to the tribe. It is the tribal council, the sacred [623] repository of all customs and traditions, that main- [684] tains intact the tribal solidarity and purity by outcasting the man and woman who have become

Sr Mukherjea O. Y-4,5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
AW42 Santal AW42

mediums of pollution to the tribe and thereby to its security and well-being. The Santal does not take recourse to such social ostracism so much from motives of punishment as from a sense of defence against some external sin visiting the tribe; and by restoring the delinquent to the tribal fold, they want to communicate afresh the "mana" (taboo-holiness) which he was supposed to have lost by his action.

In conclusion we may say that there is a close inter-relation between the material culture, the social organization and the tribal government of the Santals. By taking recourse to various means the Santal has, in his own way, solved the problem of the struggle for existence. This we have seen in detail in the chapter on "Economic Life." Here we have seen how by their tribal polity, they have devised measures as to how to live an orderly life to achieve that security without which life on earth degenerates into the anarchy of the jungle.

3t Mukherjea O. Y-4,5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
AW42 Santal AW42

We see that the eldest babe is given a name after its grand-father. The tribal deities and ancestor-spirits are worshipped to bring good-luck to the baby. Members of the tribe offer it their best wishes, and it grows up. When in the twelfth year, by further magico-religious rites like cicatrization with boys and tattooing with girls, they are protected against further dangers at the hands of the malignant powers in their future life ; and thus the Santals keep away from harm the family, the clan and the tribe as a whole from unforeseen calamities.

105

MARRIAGE

"O, she is the light of the house," exclaimed a Santal with evident pride, when we asked him as to why they married. The Santals are a very realistic tribe, and they have long ago forestalled the drive of some of the modern totalitarian states against bachelors. They cannot simply understand the proposition as to how a man can go on in a state of single blessedness. So both sexes despise the unhappy wretch and do not hesitate to call the solitary thing "a thief, a witch or 'no man'," exactly as E. G. Man observed about seventy years ago.[1] So even today, bachelors and old maids are few and far between in the Santal tribal area, and

581 [181] 581 589 [114]

1. Ref. E. G. Man, *Sonthalia and the Sonthals.*

3: Mukherjea O. Y-4,5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
AW42 Santal AW42

SANTAL PARGANAS

The old Santal would not grow potato due to their conservative instincts even when Pontet asked them, now they grow it along with tomato. The women now wear mill-made saris and in the urban areas of Santal Parganas, they seem indistinguishable from their Hindu sisters, because in fairs and rallies, they generally dress alike. Some widows, it has been seen at Bolpur, dress themselves in white. It is interesting to hear that in some areas, there is lesser divorce. And due to the impact of new ideas women's right in inheritance is being slowly recognised by the state and the society through indirect legal fictions.

With ideas of reform in the atmosphere, some acting as disintegrating forces, others operating on a constructive basis, it was no surprise to us to come across a manifesto signed by some prominent educated Santals of Bengal and some parts of Bihar calling upon their brethren of Midnapore, Bankura, Manbhum, Singhbum and other areas to engage in social reforms for the maintenance of their tribal honour. It stated that the Santals had firmly resolved that:

1. No Santal, man or woman, should drink *Pochoi* (rice-beer) in shops as the tribe had been ruined by drink while the grog-shop owners and *mahajans* were becoming rich. Temperance would help the Santals financially.

3: Mukherjea O. Y-4,5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
AW42 Santal AW42

To all appearances, the Santal is a jolly good fellow who seems to carry out to its logical conclusion the principle, "eat, drink and be merry and care not for the morrow." Such seemingly epicurean nonchalance meets the observant eye during a good harvest or on the eve of their tribal festivals, when their gay abandon and the spontaneous overflow of their hearts are most evident.

Wherein lies the inner source of this joy? We may only quote to ourselves the famous line in an Upanishad which speaks of the birth of this universe of ours from joy perennial and eternal, perhaps the quintessence of the primordial cause. But this would not do in the case of the aboriginal Santals.

As we were ruminating over this Santal variety of hedonism, we came across a folk-song of the Santals that threw some light on this particular aspect of their mind and soul. We give below a free rendering of the poem:—

We eat and drink and make us merry,
We live our lives in joy divine ;
This earthly body gasps for breath,
What's the joy in the sleep of death?
There's joy in a wander-lust,
Joy in treks from land to land.
Like morning dew sparkling, fading,
Like dancing drops on glistening leaves,
Our lives in balance tremble here.

3r Mukherjea O. Y-4, 5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1902
AW42 Santal AW42

•181 A little reflection, however, will reveal that the inner source of the Santal's joy in life is not the epicurean outlook we generally associate with Omar Khayyam as distilled into English poetry by the pessimistic school of thought represented by Fitz-Gerald in his famous stanza:—

> Here with a Loaf of Bread beneath the Bough,
> A Flask of Wine, a Book of Verse—and Thou
> Beside me singing in the Wilderness—
> And Wilderness is Paradise enow.

[812] Nor do we find in the Santal folk-song, evidence of a philosophy similar to that enunciated, in the famous lines associated with Charvaka: *Yavat jibet sukham jibet, Rinam kritva ghritam pibet* (So long as you live, live well: drink clarified butter even by borrowing).

181 167 The source of the Santal's joy lies embedded in the lines in the middle of the song celebrating the Santal's wander-lust, his joy in "treks from land to land," in the lure of the virgin soil, new flowers and leaves.

Any one who has studied the story of the genesis and migration of the Santals in their legends will be struck by their migratory instinct. History shows that the infiltration of civilisation in early times generally pushed the tribe into the backwoods where they could live well their primitive care-free life.

Jt Mukherjea O. Y-4, 5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
AW42 Santal AW42

With a characteristic naïveté, the Santal Guru Kolean told Rev. Skrefsrud that, since the very beginning of things, the Santals were ever migrating "like caterpillars, advancing, grazing and eating". Although the tribe has accepted the life of settled agriculturists, the inner urge to perpetual movement towards the newer beauties that the earth can offer is wonderfully revealed, in the song quoted above, as an ever-present instinct in the heart and soul of the tribe.

Virgin Nature may thus claim herself to be "both law and impulse" to the Santals, and this throws some light on the frank, straightforward and essentially truthful nature of the tribe. And even the corroding influence of what is called 'civilisation' has not to any great extent robbed the people of their primary virtues. It is a tribute to humanity that the heart of the Santal is still sound.

4: Biswas D, E-3, 4 (1931-1945) 1956
AW42 Santal AW42
SANTAL PARGANAS

would be pardoned with the exception of the leaders and those who had committed murder. The Santals took this offer as a confession of weakness and in the month of September again renewed their activity. By the end of the month of September the area from Deoghar to the South Western border of the district came in the hands of the Santals. The Santals showed great bravery and reckless courage in the struggle against the military. As long as their national drums continued to beat, the whole party would stand and allow themselves to be shot down. 175 648 669 175 648 669 181.

The Santals showed great bravery in this struggle and they did not understand yielding. Once forty Santals refused to surrender and took shelter inside a mud house. The troops surrounded the mud house and fired at them but the Santals answered with their arrows. Then the sepoys made a big hole through the wall, and the Captain ordered them to surrender but they again shot a volley of arrows through the half opened door. The sepoys started firing through the hole and the Captain again asked them to surrender but they continued shooting arrows. Some of the Sepoys were wounded. At last when the discharge of arrows from the door slackened, the Captain went inside the room with a Sepoy. He found only one old man greviously wounded, standing erect among the dead bodies. The Sepoy who accompanied the Captain asked him to throw away the arms but instead he rushed upon him and killed him with his battle axe. The Government was then compelled to proclaim Martial Law. As soon as the order for martial law went forth, the things assumed a very different appearance. The Santal rebels had to surrender and peace prevailed. 175 648 669

41 Biswas D, E-3, 4 (1931-1945) 1956
AW42 Santal AW42
SANTAL PARGANAS

797 797 177 sprang from this pair. Also they correlate *Maran Buru* with 'Satan'. They believe that *Maran Buru* spoiled the first human pair and revealed to them the secret of sexual intercourse, just like the Christian who believe that Satan is responsible for the downfall of the first pair, [796] Adam and Eve. The converted Santals observe the Christmas Day and Good Friday. Harvest Festivals are celebrated by decorating Churches and offering prayers.

795 797 177 **Effect on the Social Culture of the Santals due to alien influence.** The social system of the Santal is communistic in nature. In any festival, or ceremony the whole [181] [184] village takes part. This cohesion is now losing its strength. For this, missionary activities are to a certain extent responsible. The Christian converts are being cut off from social intercourse. Sometime a christian family is put to great inconvenience. This is particularly [764] the case when a death occurs for the non-christians will have nothing whatever to do with the disposal of the dead body. The non-christian method of disposing the dead body is by cremation whereas the converted Santals practise burial and subsequent mourning and funeral ceremonies according to the Christian way. There is [582] no bar to marrying more than one wife in Santal tribal custom. But this practice is strictly prohibited among Christian Santals as Christian religion strictly prohibits *bigamy*. Cross cousin marriage, and marriage with non-Santals is not tolerated by the tribal Santals but among Christian Santals, these things are not prohibited.

[585] The marriage ceremony is held either in the Church or in the courtyards of the house of the bride's parents

of Cuisnaw M-S (1932-1943) 1949 AW42 Santal AW42

CHAPTER 4

DANCING, MUSIC AND POETRY

THE word *rąską*, meaning "pleasure", is often on the lips of the Santals, and it is dear to their hearts. They turn from their difficulties and sorrows to find solace in one or other of the many ways in which they can experience *rąską*. Among these dancing is one of the most important. Their word for dancing is the same as that used for the play of children—*enec'*—and dancing is indeed the play of the tribe. In every village there is a dancing floor, an open space that is well cared for. At festival times it is swept and freshly plastered with cowdung by young unmarried girls, and when it is not in use for dancing it is the place where the young men gather in the evenings to discuss their affairs and interests.

Some of the dances are connected with particular festivals, and they are performed only at those times or during the whole of the month in which the festival takes place. There are other dances that are suitable at any time during the year. Some are dances for women alone and others for men alone, while in a few both men and women dance. The chief element of variety is introduced by means of varying the rhythm; to the casual observer most of the dances look the same. A group of men or of women dance together, forming a line with their arms linked, stepping sideways or forward and then backward, keeping time to the beating accompaniment of the drums, moving either in a circle or from one side of the dancing-floor to the other, and from time to time breaking out into song. Whenever there is an occasion for rejoicing there will be dancing. It is much in evidence during the celebrations and ceremonies after the birth of a child or at his fuller reception into the tribe, and again during marriage festivities. The general type of dance on all these occasions is known as *don*, which has within it many variations. At these times it is the women who do the dancing, while the men furnish an accompaniment with drums and flutes, and many of the songs refer directly to the purpose for which the folk have gathered together. During marriage ceremonies the *bapla*, or type of dance specifically associated with marriages, is also in evidence. The *doṅger* is the dance of the men on the night of the annual hunt. It is a wild type of dance, when there is much leaping in the air. Two of the young men stripped of clothing dance about in front of the lines, and the

St Culshaw M-5 (1932-1943) 1949 AW42 Santal AW42

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cancellation of the great Lakshmi Puja gathering at Sarenga. They put out pickets and for one year by this means they secured its abandonment; the following year it took place with small numbers attending, which have since increased. The one permanent memorial of the movement, however, is in connection with this gathering, for whereas formerly it used to continue throughout the night, it now starts earlier in the day and the crowds disperse as evening comes on. In every other respect the reformers were disappointed. Two of the three leaders became disillusioned about the possibility of reform from within; their teaching took on a new note. One of them in a speech pointed to the example of the Karen people of Burma of whom he had been reading, and in due course these two presented themselves for Baptism.

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The proposed reforms were "puritan" in character. There was nothing specifically Christian about them, and indeed they were exactly similar to those advocated by many movements among Santals and others that have been influenced by Hinduism. A dislike of puritanism is one of the reasons why Christianity has not made more headway. Santals frequently object that when they become Christian they have to give up their *raska*. An old preacher wrote: "It would be good if people kept their daughters at home, for then dancing at festivals would come to an end and words of religion could enter people's ears and stick. I have visited many villages and still do so. Folk do not wish to enter the new Way because they will have to give up sin. They say: 'Yes, religion is good, but there is no pleasure in it. There is no joy apart from drinking beer and spirits; whether at births or marriages there could be no jollification.'" Unlike some other missions, we in Bankura have not asked for a pledge of total abstinence as a prerequisite of Baptism, but in practice many of the Christians tend to talk as though drunkenness is the greatest sin as it is certainly the most conspicuous failing of the Santals. Apart from the rights and wrongs of total abstinence propaganda among primitive people, Christians are normally debarred from sharing in the village festivals that afford the chief opportunities of communal revelry with its accompaniments of drinking and dancing. Although there has never been any preaching against dancing in the area, its association with the festivals and the tribal cult is sufficient to discourage it among the Christians. It is not surprising, therefore, that the lives of the Christians, who are cut off from sharing in the traditional manifestations of tribal rejoicing, appear colourless to the heathen

54 Culshaw M-S (1932-1943) 1949 AW42 Santal AW42

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Santal, who is not friendly disposed towards puritanism in any shape or form.

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Another type of objection to Christianity arises out of what may be termed the "marginal teaching", largely unintended, of those who propagate the faith. "I shall never become a Christian", said an old man. "What should I do with a pair of shoes?" This remark was greeted with evident amusement on the part of the bystanders. He had been more impressed by the garb of the preachers than by their words. Many of the younger men and women of the Christian community drift away to employment in the towns, and when they return home they are not slow to display their superior material culture. Shoes, fountain-pens and wrist-watches are symbols of prosperity, and it is natural that in the Santal village they should at times be confused with the fruits of Christianity. The Santal who has no desire to change his lot or who sees no possibility of doing so is content with the old way of life.

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Undoubtedly the most deep-rooted objection, however, arises from the fact that the individual Santal knows of no security apart from his clan and tribe, and he sees in Christianity something that threatens to become a disintegrating influence. This awareness has developed its own mythology in beliefs which appear to the Christian missionary to be entirely without rational foundation and which seem to have been deliberately invented by persons maliciously disposed. What, for example, can be made of the commonly repeated assertion that the ritual of Baptism is accomplished by means that revolt the sensibilities of Santals, such as the transfer of spittle from the mouth of the officiating minister to that of the convert? Yet it is likely that the stories have grown without deliberate intent. Santals affirm that mixed marriages are actively encouraged by Christians. This belief, though mistaken, is not without foundation. One of the early converts related that he held back because he was not married. According to his own account he had some difficulty in making the missionary understand his attitude, for if he had married after Baptism the only alternatives before him would have been to marry someone who was related to him or to marry a non-Santal, and quite naturally he could bring himself to do neither. The most usual response to the appeal of the preacher is expressed in the words: "Yes, your religion is good and some day we shall all become Christians: but—we shall wait until all of us can do it together." Less commonly one hears the reply: "If the headman became a Christian, all in this village would do so."